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July 15, 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: Request for Approval of
Research Project on Soviet Linguistics

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PROBLEM

1. To undertake a systematic survey of Soviet literature on the theory of language and its relations to political and social problems in the USSR. [No thorough survey exists of Communist writings on the nature and function of language.]

FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM

2. A substantial body of linguistic theory has been developed in Russia during the Communist period which, like most Soviet social science, has been sharply focussed on the use of language as a political instrument. This literature has discussed such questions as the most effective techniques for expressing ideas in ways which will be persuasive, the development of an appropriate terminology for political discourse, the problems of communication with minority groups whose native language is not Russian, the relationship between language, action, and belief, and the like.

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DISCUSSION

4. The interest of Soviet authors in the study of language springs partly from theoretical but equally from highly practical considerations. The Soviets have developed the use of language as a conscious tool for influencing attitudes, beliefs, and political loyalties more than any other national government. They have harnessed the energies of Soviet linguistic experts to the problems of political control in accordance with the general Marxist view that all knowledge has a political and utilitarian purpose.

5. In addition to their concern with designing effective means of communication with Russian speaking peoples the Soviets have since the early days of the Revolution been plagued with a very difficult problem of absorbing and controlling a wide variety of national groups with languages different from Russian. There have been a number of phases in the history of policy with respect to these national groups, each phase being accompanied by a different language policy. They have seriously explored the possibilities of a universal language like Esperanto. They have at times followed the policy of attempting to force instruction in Russian and they have at times followed the opposite policy of encouraging the further development of the various languages of the various minority groups. Their policy with respect to language is something of an indicator of their general policy with respect to the minorities.

6. The concern of the central authorities with linguistic problems is illustrated by the fact that Joseph Stalin considered them vital enough to enter himself personally and publicly in a great linguistic controversy in 1950.

CONCLUSION

7. It is believed that a treatment of the Soviet literature on linguistic and communication problems would throw much light first on Soviet propaganda

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and propaganda techniques and, second, on Soviet attitudes and policies toward the minority groups. Such a study requires a very rare and peculiar combination of talents which is certainly not available in the Government.

8. A budget estimate is attached as Tab A.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

9. That this project be approved by DD/I.

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